

Selectmen want override vote on new library

By John Chaffee
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DUXBURY — Voters may be asked to pass a Proposition 2½ debt exclusion so the town can borrow \$3 million of the \$6.3 million needed to convert the empty upper Alden school into a new public library.

Although library trustees and the library corporation favor taking on the debt within the existing tax levy, the three selectmen said last night that they favor a debt exclusion vote.

"I think it's the fairest way to go," said selectmen Chairwoman Margaret Kearney after a 90-minute presentation of conversion plans to selectmen and members of the finance and fiscal advisory committees.

Selectmen did not vote on the issue last night. Instead, they agreed to discuss it and vote at their Jan. 30 meeting.

Under Proposition 2½, which was enacted by Massachusetts voters in 1980, communities may vote to borrow money for capital projects outside local levy limits imposed by the law.

Unlike a general Proposition 2½ override, which permanently increases a local tax levy, a debt exclusion affects the tax levy only until the amount borrowed has been paid, usually over 20 years.

Plans to convert the 68-year-old former Duxbury High School building into a library are similar to those rejected by voters at the annual town meeting two years ago.

Duxbury

At that time, the plan got a majority of the votes cast, but not the required two-thirds majority.

"The message we took away from that town meeting was that this is a wonderful project, but that the cost is too high to bear," Deborah Bornheimer, president of the library corporation, said at last night's meeting.

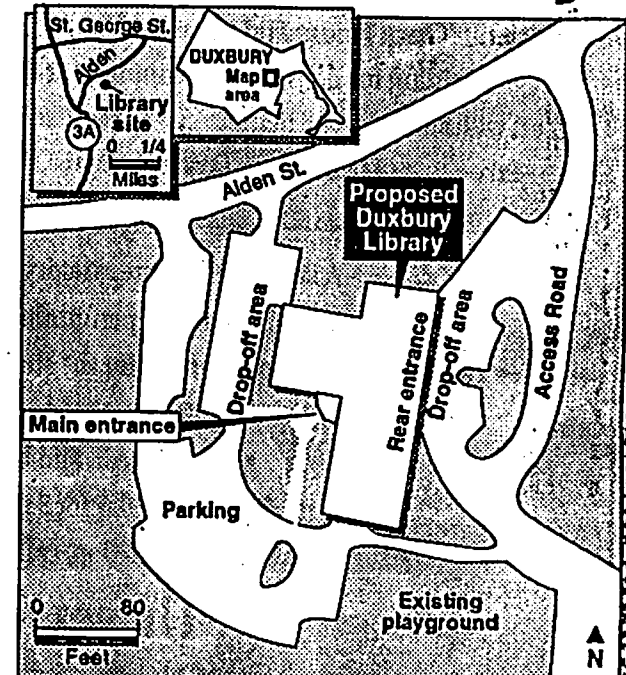
This year, instead of being asked to borrow \$5.5 million for the project, voters will be asked to borrow \$3 million, Bornheimer said.

A "new amalgam of funding sources" has been assembled, she said, including an expected \$2 million grant from the state, \$1 million from a private fundraising effort that's just begun and an already authorized \$200,000 federal grant.

"We believe it's now or never for a new library," Bornheimer said. "It is our dream to be in the new Alden library before year's end in 1996."

In response to a question from finance committee member Larry Lenrow, Bornheimer said the new library, which will more than triple the size of the existing facility, should provide enough room through the year 2020.

Warrant articles being drafted for the March 11 town meeting would authorize transfer of the property to library trustees, create a building committee, authorize the necessary borrowing and make the project contingent upon receipt of the state grant.



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Selectmen, who said they support conversion plans, indicated they may want town meeting approval contingent on a debt exclusion vote at the March 25 annual town election.